2:Purcell G-4 (no date) 1951 AL1 Southeast Asia AL1
Chinese

incomes by work at home or in local workshops. The drawn-thread and embroidery work engaged in by the girls and middle-aged women in their spare time earned them about twenty cents a day per person. Others wove cloth at small weaving-shops or sewed in tailors'-shops, earning about thirty cents a day. None of these occupations were, in fact, particularly remunerative. Older women were engaged in making joss-paper or in knitting fishing-nets. Apart from farming and trade, the men were engaged in relatively few occupations—there were coolies, barbers, carpenters, school-teachers, and fishermen.

We come now to the subject of remittances from the Nanyang regarding which there has been much conflicting evidence. No satisfactory estimate of these remittances has been made for South-east Asia as a whole, and in any case their value has varied greatly with the fluctuation in trade.[1] There had been a time when the ownership of a few rubber-trees had meant affluence, when Chinese importers in the Nanyang could undersell those of all other nationalities and still make a large profit, 'and when they had the native peasants so under control through indebtedness that they could sell them almost anything at any price'.[2]

There had been times when labour was so scarce that Chinese coolies could in a few years accumulate savings enough to start in business, and when employees of Chinese retailers could force up wages to the point where it was more economical for the employer to take them in as partners. But by 1935 all this had changed. New immigration restrictions, motivated by the depression, had cut large numbers of Chinese labourers off from labour opportunities abroad while, at the same time, life had become, perhaps, a little more secure in this time of general débâcle for a certain privileged few—for example, the small retail traders already established in the Nanyang who had less competition to meet from their countrymen and who could circumvent the new head tax on males by bringing women and children from China to take the place of male assistants.

(This investigation, we must remember, dates from a time when Southeast Asia was only just beginning to recover from the trade depression of 1929–32.)

[1] In 1941 about $S $10 million was remitted to China from Malaya, but there is nothing to indicate how much of this was in the ordinary way of trade.

[2] This is placed in quotation-marks to indicate that it represents the views of Dr Ta Chen.

2:Purcell G-4 (no date) 1981 AL1 Southeast Asia AL1
Chinese

Dr Ta Chen gives a table (p. 83) of the sources of income of 100 emigrant families from October 1934 to September 1935 which shows that the average monthly remittance per family was 81·4 per cent. of the total income, ranging between 75·5 per cent. for incomes below $20 per mensem, and 84·1 per cent. for incomes between $125 and $250. This enabled the emigrant families to maintain a much higher standard of living as a whole than those families which had no source of assistance from abroad.

Apart from the purely economic effects of overseas migration upon these communities of east Kwangtung and south Fukien, there is evidence to show that intercourse with Southeast Asia was having a considerable modifying effect on the social institutions, religion, and general outlook both of the emigrants themselves and of the families in China whence they came and to which usually they eventually returned.

In China the social unit has immemorially been the family, and it remains so except to the extent that it has broken down in Communist areas under the influence of Communist ideology. The system which has as its object the perpetuation of the family tree, to a considerable extent subordinates the individual to its needs. But in these emigrant communities in China and in the Nanyang itself, it has had to undergo a great deal of modification to survive. Where resources permit, a dual family system has grown up, whereby one section lives in China and the other in the Nanyang. This dual, or joint family, takes a number of forms which may vary; in the case of a well-off family (to give an example) the head of the family aged 61 lives in Siam, his wife (aged 58) lives in the ancestral village in China and is the acting head of the family, the first concubine (56) is a Siamese and lives in Siam, the second concubine (44) is in the village, and the third and fourth concubines (both Chinese, aged 30 and 19) are also in Siam, and the children of the unions are, except for the son by the wife who is with his father in Siam, all with their mothers, either in Siam or in China. An example of a middle-class family is of a father aged 77 in the village, his son aged 50, the head of the family, in Singapore, and his wife (the acting head of the family) in the village in China. The head of the family had his concubine in Singapore, and the offspring, either of the head of the family or his brothers (who belong to the family) were either in Singapore or at home. A third case of a lower-class family is a more simple pattern with the head of

2:Purcell G-4 (no date) 1951 AL1 Southeast Asia AL1
Chinese

the family in Siam, his wife (acting head of the family) in the village in China, and most of the children of the marriage in China.

Such arrangements obviously call for careful financing. The emigrant abroad, after deducting what he needs to meet his expenses, usually remits his savings periodically to his home in China for the support of the family there and to meet extraordinary expenses, such as of a marriage in the family. At the same time the family home in China is a kind of insurance for the emigrant, for he can always return there if he is unemployed.

The influence of the emigrant on the age-old ideas and customs of his home village has been great. If he has had much foreign experience he almost invariably condemns the traditional family arrangement. In the words of a returned tin-miner from Malaya:[1]

> The joint family is an obnoxious social institution. When a member of such a family earns money he is obliged to support all the rest of it and to carry a heavy economic burden. I have had a very bitter experience and always felt that I am virtually the slave of my family. They are of no help to me at all.

A critical attitude towards the family and marriage systems is very general among returned emigrants. They remark that living in the modern world is a complicated affair, and that the joint family is no longer practicable. Many of them felt (in 1935) that an early disintegration of the family in south China was inevitable. Moreover, many of the emigrants have seen what marriage may mean in modern Western life when love and courtship enter into the marriage preliminaries and the union is (or should be) based on affection. An emigrant inevitably contrasts this with the Chinese system wherein the husband and wife are often unknown to one another before marriage. Stubborn and resistant as the traditional family system is, there is evidence from all over the Nanyang that as regards marriage the traditional procedure is in retreat before the modern marriage, and that the joint family system is being strained in some cases almost to breaking-point. Again, in the Nanyang itself, the increased mobility of members of the family is a force threatening to loosen its bonds.

In spite of these tendencies, marriage custom among the Chinese in the Nanyang at the time of the outbreak of the war between Japan and the Allies in 1941 generally followed Chinese traditional

[1] Ta Chen, op. cit. p. 142.

5: Dobby K-4 (no date) 1950 ALL Southeast Asia ALL

tools are all made by villagers using the palms and bamboos of their setting. Boats, shoes and tools are made of wood by peasants, mostly for their own use. While this type of industry usually secures no place in national statistics and has low monetary value, it plays a most important part in Southeast Asia life which may be described as still in the "Wood Age" so far as most peasant and rural life is concerned. Domestically-made cigars and cigarettes supply local needs and rapidly displace the *areca* or *betel* chewing habit. In Burma, the Philippines and Java cigar-making has become commercialised for trade and export; in Java some $9 million of hand-made cigarettes entered trade during 1937.

Throughout the region, too, are scattered remnants of a metal-working industry, as in the beaten silver of Malaya and Java, the niello work of Siam, and the gold settings for precious stones in Burma.

But these domestic industries rank as small by external standards and they play a negligible part in international trade. They must not be forgotten, however, because in the evolution of Southeast Asia we may see grow up forms of industrialisation originating in these domestic industries, as has been the case in the industrial evolution both of Europe and of the Far East. In these domestic industries little or no money is involved. At their simplest they are "subsistence industries" providing the family needs and scarcely anything more.

Thus most Southeast Asia people produce what food their families need and what articles they need. Their requirements from outside are very small and in any case their way of life involves so little money that they have small means to buy anything outside their local subsistence ecology. That was the earlier condition everywhere in Southeast Asia before the industrial revolution in Europe, and it continues both in the simple form and in many variations even today, when there have evolved groups of people in Southeast Asia who are entirely dependent on wages to buy food and what other articles they need. The subsistence principle is still strong in that very little money interchange goes on among the great majority of the population; some of them by doing part-time work earn wages, yet the money they earn has a very low average, indicated by the very low per capita revenues of the various states. Just before the war, Indochina revenue

5: Dobby K-4 (no date) 1950 All Southeast Asia All

averaged below $2 per person per annum and revenues were of that low order for all Southeast Asia countries except Malaya, where it was about $70 per person, a sign that Malaya, of all these countries, was the one where work and activities centred on money and had moved farthest from the subsistence principle.

It has to be noted that the small amount of money involved in such ecologies does not mean poverty in the European sense : it represents only that margin of necessities which is outside the subsistence ecology. In addition to the little money it obtains, each family in general has both its food and its domestic equipment produced by itself, or in conjunction with helpers from the village community. This is a state of society long since outgrown in Europe though we have to allow for it in every phase of Southeast Asia industry and trade and to assume it will continue to play a part in future changes.

Agricultural Processing

Because Southeast Asia is so overwhelmingly agricultural its mechanical industries relate largely to agricultural processes. Rice mills, sugar mills, starch factories (from sago and tapioca) and sack factories, have all grown up in connection with agricultural processing in every one of these territories. In addition, rubber factories, oil presses and sugar mills have been established on western lines in association with European-style agricultural developments. The fabrication of rubber has not gone far within this region; tyres have been made in Java where also mass-produced rubber shoes were made for Southeast Asia markets. For the most part, mechanical processing industries are located peripherally to the countries concerned and they operate primarily for immediate export, though small rice, brick and sugar factories have spread inland away from coastal sites.

Textiles

Apart from food, the chief personal need of Southeast Asia people is cloth and the demand for textiles ranks as by far the greatest single item of fabricated goods. Most of the textiles recorded are imported; the domestic industry has tended to disappear except in the remoter districts, and textile factories have not been set up to any extent within Southeast Asia. Cotton spinning at Semarang, Tegal and Damak and some 200 small

7: Janlekha X-4,5 (1948-1953) 1956 AO7 Central Thai
Southeast Asia AL1

foreign army of occupation has preserved it from disruption. The essential and distinctive character of a plural society is that it is dominated by economic forces, and, outside a few partly sheltered oases, Southeast Asia illustrates the capitalist system in its purest form.[18]

Another common feature is the dominance of the agricultural section of the population. The latest available figures show the percentage proportions of population dependent on agriculture in the area as follows: Burma, 68; Indonesia, 66; Philippines, 69; Thailand, 85.[19] The same source indicates the proportions for various regions of the world as follows: North America, 20; Oceania, 30; Europe, 33; South America, 60; Asia, 70; and Africa, 74.

With the prevailing techniques of production and the consequent low productivity per man, dominance of agriculture means low per capita national income. When countries are grouped by level of economic development on the basis of per capita national income as of 1950, all the six countries of Southeast Asia -- Burma, Indo-China, Indonesia, Malaya, Philippines, and Thailand -- fall in the underdeveloped group.[20] Moreover, there is in Southeast Asia a true surplus population on the land in the sense that even under the present methods of cultivation a sizeable fraction of the

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18. Ibid., p. 77.

19. Food and Agriculture Organization, 1953 Yearbook, Vol. VII.

20. Eugene Staley, The Future of Underdeveloped Countries (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), pp. 16-17.

18: Firth E-4 (no date) 1950 ALl Southeast Asia ALl

433 annum. Productivity in the British fishing industry was, and probably still
226 is, at least eight times as great per man. In the United States' fishing in-
565 dustry it is much greater still. This immensely greater productivity per man is of course achieved only by a much heavier use of capital equipment. Technological investment, then, is an obvious method of trying to raise peasant production.

434 Peasant income in this region is thus low by most standards. Adequate
511 information about this is lacking, but there is no reason to doubt the indi-
565 cative character of what has been collected. For instance, an inquiry in Java in 1926 showed that over 60 per cent of the people had in cash and in kind incomes of less than £12 10s. a year (150 Dutch florins), and 80 per cent had incomes of less than £25 a year (300 florins). In Malaya in 1940 I calculated that the fishermen of the east coast earned on the average about £12 a year. This does not mean much without consideration of the prices of goods on which the income was spent. But any such comparison would soon make it clear that a man with such an income was hard put to it to keep his family in comfort. Cash incomes have risen steeply during and since the war, but so have the prices of consumer goods, and many peasants are probably rather worse off than before, unless they have been able to sell rice or other scarcity goods.

433 The peasant economy of South East Asia uses abundant labour and has
565 a low level of capital equipment. Even then, owing to lack of efficient
461 organization, one can point to a great amount of unused man-hours. Yet these features must not be over-stressed. It is common to blame the peasant for a *dolce far niente* attitude, and attribute his poverty to his idleness. What J. Johnston Abraham, the author of the well-known travel book, *Surgeon's Log*,[1] wrote forty years ago of the Malay is often quoted in essence still:

> The Malay . . . has the aristocratic contempt for toil . . . [he] is of all things a philosopher. He squats in the warm sun and chews betel contentedly. He sees the obvious foolishness of working in a country too hot for toil, when the earth is so prolific that a fortnight's leisurely labour will produce food for a year, and the water is so plentifully supplied with fish that an hour, in the cool of the evening with a net, will supply luxury for a fortnight.
>
> Anyone who has lived among the Malay peasantry and has seen their back-breaking work of rice-planting, or their long hours at sea in the broiling sun hauling the nets for fish, will know what a parody this is. The working rhythm of the Asiatic peasant is different from that of the European. The economic system is not well enough geared to alternative employment when technical hitches occur in his ordinary occupation. But the peasant is not simply thriftless of his time and his money. He plans with care his ploughing, sowing, weeding, and harvesting; he is assiduous in searching for fodder for his animals, in watering his vegetable garden, in repairing his fishing-boat or his net. If he can scrape together some extra cash above the daily needs of his family, he may spend it on clothes for his child or jewellery

[1] London, Chapman & Hall (14th rev. ed., 19[illegible]), pp. 69–70.